

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

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EXDIS (HANDLE AS NODIS)

FROM ATHERTON

U.S. DEL NO. 80

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, XF, US
SUBJECT: ATHERTON MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD
IN GENEVA -- MARCH 8

1. SUMMARY: I HAD CORDIAL HOUR AND HALF MEETING
WITH SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD IN GENEVA MARCH 8.
I BRIEFED HIM ON STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS ON DECLARATION
OF PRINCIPLES, ON ISSUES WHICH ARE AT HEART OF
NEGOTIATIONS AT PRESENT TIME AND WHICH WILL BE
FOCUS OF BEGIN TALKS IN WASHINGTON, AND ON KING
HUSSEIN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS. I DESCRIBED
FRANKLY AREAS OF U.S.-ISRAELI DIFFERENCE AND
THEN STRESSED POINT THAT ON-GOING NEGOTIATING
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PROCESS IS ESSENTIAL AS VEHICLE TO BRING ABOUT
INTERNAL DEBATE AND EVENTUALLY CHANGES OF GOVERNMENTAL
POLICY. SAUDI READILY AGREED TO THIS BUT KEPT
QUIETLY RETURNING TO THEME THAT IF THIS APPROACH
WAS TO WORK IT WOULD REQUIRE THE U.S. TAKING A
STRONG STAND ON THE ISSUES. HE SAID SADAT'S TRIP
TO JERUSALEM, AND HIS COMMITMENT TO PEACE, HAD BEEN

ADMIRABLE AS FAR AS THEY WENT, BUT PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD WERE BEGINNING TO ASK, WHAT HAS IT PRODUCED IN CONCRETE TERMS? END SUMMARY.

2. I HAD CORDIAL ONE AND ONE-HALF HOUR MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD EVENING OF MARCH 8 IN GENEVA. STERNER AND SHERMAN ACCOMPANIED ME. ON SAUDI SIDE BESIDES PRINCE SAUD WERE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER ALTHUNAYAN, SAUDI AMBASSADOR TO THE U.N. IN GENEVA ABDUL JABBER, AND SAUD'S AIDE HASSAN SHAWAF. THE PRINCE SEEMED RELAXED AND HAPPY AFTER HIS SKIING VACATION. HE WAS PLANNING TO FLY HOME TO RIYADH IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING HIS MEETING WITH ME.

3. I SAID SECRETARY HAD WANTED ME TO BRING SAUD UP TO DATE ON DEVELOPMENTS SINCE PRESIDENT CARTER'S JANUARY STOP IN SAUDI ARABIA. I APPRECIATED SAUD RECEIVING ME DURING HIS VACATION. I REVIEWED BRIEFLY THE BACKGROUND, BEGINNING WITH THE CREATION OF THE TWO COMMITTEES OF THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, THE THREE-POINT AGENDA, THE BEGINNING OF WORK IN JERUSALEM ON ITEM ONE OF THE AGENDA -- A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES -- AND THE EGYPTIAN DECISION SUDDENLY TO PULL THEIR DELEGATION OUT OF THE TALKS. I TOLD SAUD THAT SADAT HAD COME TO WASHINGTON IN A DISCOURAGED FRAME
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OF MIND, BUT THAT BY THE TIME HE LEFT HE WAS PERSUADED TO KEEP THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS GOING ON THE CONDITION THAT THE U.S. WOULD SERVE AS AN ACTIVE MEDIATOR. SADAT HAD MADE IT CLEAR TO US THAT HIS OBJECTIVE IS A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE SETTLEMENT INVOLVING ALL OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT. HE SEES THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES NOT AS AN END IN ITSELF BUT AS A FIRST STEP IN A NEGOTIATING PROCESS WHICH HE HOPES WOULD EVENTUALLY BRING IN JORDAN AND PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVES. IF SADAT HAD BEEN INTERESTED ONLY IN A BILATERAL AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL THE TALKS HE IS CONDUCTING IN MILITARY COMMITTEE ON BILATERAL AFFAIRS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE ABLE TO MOVE AHEAD MORE RAPIDLY. THERE WERE SOME DIFFICULT PROBLEMS THAT REMAIN TO BE RESOLVED IN THE BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS -- ESPECIALLY THE QUESTION OF SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI AND ISRAEL'S WISH TO RETAIN THE USE OF AT LEAST ONE AIRFIELD THERE -- BUT OUR JUDGMENT WAS THAT THESE PROBLEMS WERE ULTIMATELY RESOLVABLE.

4. SAUD ASKED WHETHER, IN THE BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS,

ISRAEL HAD ACCEPTED RETURN TO THE INTERNATIONAL

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FRONTIER. I AFFIRMED THAT THEY HAD. SAUD SAID BUT
THERE IS THE QUESTION OF THE SETTLEMENTS. I
ACKNOWLEDGED THIS AND SAID IT WAS DEFINITELY
ONE OF THE COMPLICATING FACTORS. HOWEVER, WE
FELT EVEN THIS COULD BE SOLVED IF IT WERE NOT
FOR THE FACT THAT SADAT IS HOLDING THE DISCUSSIONS
ON THE BILATERAL FRONT IN TANDEM WITH PROGRESS
ON PRINCIPLES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE SETTLEMENT.
FOR ONE THING, THERE WERE MANY IN ISRAEL WHO WOULD
PRESS THE GOVERNMENT NOT TO LET ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENTS
IN SINAI STAND IN THE WAY OF A PEACE AGREEMENT
IF INDEED THIS WERE THE ONLY OBSTACLE.

5. I TOLD SAUD THAT WE FELT STRONGLY THAT THE
PROCESS OF NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD BE KEPT UNDERWAY
CONTINUOUSLY SINCE THIS PROVIDED PRESSURE ON
THE PARTIES TO MAKE CHANGES IN THEIR POSITIONS.
THIS PROCESS HAD STARTED WITH SADAT'S VISIT
TO JERUSALEM WHICH HAD CAUSED THE ISRAELIS TO
RETHINK THEIR LONGSTANDING ASSUMPTION THAT THE ARABS
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WERE UNWILLING TO DELIVER REAL PEACE IN RETURN FOR

RECIPROCAL CONCESSIONS. THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS WHICH WAS BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION LAID BY SADAT'S INITIATIVE PRESENTED THE BEST HOPE OF BRINGING ABOUT EVENTUAL CHANGES IN ISRAELI POSITIONS ON THE CRUCIAL ISSUES.

6. I TOLD SAUD THERE WERE THREE PRINCIPAL ISSUES ON WHICH WE AND THE ISRAELIS DIFFERED. THE FIRST OF THESE WAS THE APPROACH TO THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE. WITH RESPECT TO THE PALESTINIAN PARAGRAPH IN THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, PRESIDENT CARTER HAD SUGGESTED THE ASWAN FORMULA AS A MEANS OF BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES, AND WE HAD ADDED THE PHRASE ORIGINALLY SUGGESTED BY EGYPT: "THROUGH TALKS TO TAKE PLACE AMONG EGYPT, JORDAN, ISRAEL AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE." WE CONSIDERED THIS A PRACTICAL AND REALISTIC FORMULA. THE ISRAELIS DON'T LIKE IT BECAUSE OF THEIR PREFERENCE FOR LANGUAGE THAT IS MORE NARROWLY FOCUSED ON THE RESIDENTS OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA. THEY ALSO OBJECT TO THE PHRASE "LEGITIMATE RIGHTS." THE EGYPTIANS WOULD PREFER, INSTEAD OF OUR ASWAN FORMULA, THE PHRASE "DETERMINE THEIR FUTURE" BUT AS A PRACTICAL MATTER WE THOUGHT THE EGYPTIANS COULD ACCEPT THE ASWAN FORMULA, IF THE ISRAELIS ALSO ACCEPTED IT, AND IF THE OTHER PROBLEMS IN THE DECLARATION COULD BE RESOLVED. THIS COULD CLEARLY BE AN ITEM FOR DISCUSSION DURING BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON.

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7. THE SECOND ISSUE BETWEEN OURSELVES AND THE ISRAELIS AT PRESENT WAS THE QUESTION OF THE APPLICABILITY OF THE WITHDRAWAL PROVISION OF RESOLUTION 242. ISRAEL HAD ALWAYS TAKEN THE POSITION THAT RESOLUTION 242 DID NOT MEAN TOTAL WITHDRAWAL; HOWEVER, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT WAS ALSO NOW SAYING THAT RESOLUTION 242 DID NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK AND GAZA AS WELL AS THE OTHER FRONTS. THE U.S. ASSUMPTION HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT THE PROVISIONS OF RES 242 APPLY TO ALL FRONTS AND WE ARE NOW IN A

PROTRACTED ARGUMENT WITH THE ISRAELIS ON THIS POINT.

8. THE THIRD ISSUE CONCERNED ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN OCCUPIED TERRITORY. THE U.S. SAID LONG AGO THAT THESE SETTLEMENTS WOULD PROVE TO BE AN OBSTACLE TO A PEACE SETTLEMENT. NOW THAT ACTIVE NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDERWAY, WE WERE SEEING THIS STATEMENT BORNE OUT. THE QUESTION OF SETTLEMENTS WOULD ALSO PROBABLY BE A TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION DURING THE BEGIN VISIT. I DESCRIBED FOR SAUDI THE CURRENT ISRAELI DEBATE OVER SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY AND THE RESULTS OF THE LATEST ISRAELI CABINET DECISION. I POINTED OUT THAT INTERNAL DEBATE WAS BEGINNING TO TAKE PLACE IN ISRAEL ON THIS QUESTION. ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THIS WAS THAT THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS WAS FORCING ISRAELIS TO FACE UP TO THE INHERENT CONFLICT BETWEEN CONTINUING TO EXPAND THE SETTLEMENTS AND THE PURSUIT OF NEGOTIATIONS, AND TO THE STRONG U.S. VIEWS ON THIS ISSUE.

9. I TOLD SAUDI THAT THE BEGIN VISIT NEXT WEEK WOULD BE A VERY IMPORTANT STEP IN THE PROCESS OF

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MAKING CLEAR WHERE WE BELIEVE THERE NEEDS TO BE
MOVEMENT IN ISRAELI POSITIONS ON THESE ISSUES.

I DID NOT, HOWEVER, WISH TO LEAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT INSTANTANEOUS CHANGE COULD COME ABOUT AS THE RESULT OF THE VISIT ALONE. THE DECISIONS WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR BEGIN TO MAKE AND WOULD REQUIRE EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION WITHIN HIS CABINET. SAUD ASKED WHETHER I DID NOT FEEL THAT IN SPITE OF THE INTERNAL DEBATE AND FERMENT THAT WAS GOING ON IN ISRAEL THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT WAS NEVERTHELESS HARDENING ITS POSITIONS. HE CITED THE QUESTION OF WITHDRAWAL. I AGREED THIS WAS DEFINITELY THE TOUGHEST ISSUE THAT HAD TO BE RESOLVED. SAUD SAID THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON SETTLEMENTS WAS ALSO VERY AGGRESSIVE. I SAID THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S POLICY WAS THAT ISRAELIS HAD A RIGHT TO SETTLE ANYWHERE IN THE WEST BANK. THIS WAS A CHANGE FROM THE POLICY OF THE ALIGNMENT GOVERNMENT WHICH HAD CONCENTRATED THE SETTLEMENTS IN "STRATEGIC" AREAS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF SECURITY.

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10. SAUD PERSISTED ON HIS POINT. WAS THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS REALLY BRINGING ABOUT GREATER FLEXIBILITY ON THE PART OF ISRAEL? I SAID THIS MIGHT NOT BE IMMEDIATELY FELT IN THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY, BUT THE FACT WAS THAT THERE WERE INCREASING VOICES WITHIN ISRAEL QUESTIONING BEGIN'S POLICY ON THE SETTLEMENTS AND ON HIS INTERPRETATION OF RESOLUTION 242. WHETHER THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT WOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE THE NECESSARY DECISIONS TO REMOVE THESE IMPEDIMENTS FROM THE PEACE PROCESS REMAINED TO BE SEEN. I SAID I BELIEVED MY MISSION -- IN THE SENSE THAT I WAS CONSTANTLY TURNING UP IN ISRAEL AND CONSTANTLY PRESSING THESE ISSUES -- HAD HELPED KEEP THE DEBATE ALIVE IN ISRAEL. SAUD REITERATED THE ONLY EVIDENCE HE SAW WAS OF A HARDENING OF ISRAEL'S POSITION. I SAID THAT PERHAPS "POLARIZING" WAS A BETTER WORD. MANY ISRAELIS RECOGNIZED THAT THE POSITIONS ON THESE ISSUES THAT ISRAEL TOOK WERE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND

IN PUBLIC SUPPORT OF ISRAEL WITHIN THE U.S. ISRAELIS HAD UNDOUBTEDLY NOTED THE DECLINE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL IN THE PAST YEAR. THERE WERE MANY PEOPLE IN ISRAEL WHO BELIEVED

THAT THE STATE OF U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS CONSTITUTED
THE BASIC FOUNDATION OF ISRAELI SECURITY.
WE HAD TO FACE ISRAEL WITH THESE ISSUES FIRMLY,
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BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO SEEM
TO GANG UP ON THEM IN A WAY THAT WOULD CAUSE THEM TO
RALLY AROUND HARD-LINE POSITIONS. THIS WAS A
DIFFICULT LINE TO DRAW, BUT ONE THAT WE HAD TO
TRY TO MANAGE SUCCESSFULLY.

11. SAUD SAID THAT IF HE WERE TO ACCEPT OUR
ARGUMENT THAT THE CONTINUITY OF THE NEGOTIATING
PROCESS WAS A VITAL FACTOR IN BRINGING ABOUT
CHANGES IN ISRAEL'S POSITION, THEN HE WOULD ADD
THAT THIS WOULD ONLY WORK IF THE U.S. ADOPTED A
STRONG POSITION ON THE ISSUES AS IT HAD WITH
RESPECT TO ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY. NOT TO
TAKE SUCH POSITIONS AND YET TO EXPECT ISRAEL'S
POLICIES TO EVOLVE SIMPLY WOULD NOT WORK. I
ACKNOWLEDGED SAUD'S POINT. THERE WOULD NOT HAVE
BEEN SUCH INTENSIVE DEBATE WITHIN ISRAEL ON THE
SETTLEMENT QUESTION IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE
U.S. TAKING A STRONG POSITION ON THIS QUESTION.
I WANTED TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT SADAT'S PERSISTENCE
IN ADHERING TO THE OBJECTIVE OF REAL AND COMPREHENSIVE
PEACE IS A VITAL ASSET TO THE PEACE PROCESS AND
ESSENTIAL IF PRESIDENT CARTER IS TO PURSUE A
SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY. SAUD SAID THAT THE POSITIONS
OF THE PRINCIPAL ARAB STATES -- EGYPT, SYRIA,
JORDAN, EVEN THE PALESTINIANS -- HAD BECOME MORE
FLEXIBLE IN RECENT YEARS WHEREAS ISRAEL'S POSITION
HAD STEADILY HARDENED. I SAID THE U.S. RECOGNIZED
THAT WE DID NOT HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD
TO ACHIEVE A PEACE SETTLEMENT; THE PACE OF
NEGOTIATIONS MUST BE KEPT UP.

12. SAUD ASKED WHETHER SADAT HAD SAID HE WOULD
DEFINITELY NOT RESUME MEETINGS OF THE POLITICAL
COMMITTEE UNTIL THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES HAD
BEEN FINISHED. I SAID SADAT HAD FRAMED HIS
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CONDITIONS IN RATHER GENERAL TERMS SAYING HE
NEEDED EVIDENCE THAT "REAL PROGRESS" WAS BEING
MADE ON A DECLARATION. THIS PERHAPS HAD MEANT
THAT HE WOULD NOT INSIST UPON HAVING EVERYTHING ALL
WRAPPED UP BEFORE RESUMPTION OF THE COMMITTEE
MEETINGS.

13. I SUMMARIZED FOR SAUD MY IMPRESSIONS OF KING
HUSSEIN'S POSITION. I HAD TRIED TO OBTAIN SOME
IDEA OF WHAT HUSSEIN THOUGHT HE WOULD REQUIRE TO
JOIN THE NEGOTIATIONS AT SOME STAGE. IN ESSENCE,
IT SEEMED TO US THAT HE WAS ADOPTING A WAIT-AND-SEE
ATTITUDE. HE WANTED TO SEE WHAT THE DECLARATION
OF PRINCIPLES WOULD SAY, AND IF HE CONSIDERS
THE DECLARATION INADEQUATE, HE WOULD WANT TO
KNOW WHAT THE NEXT STAGE OF NEGOTIATIONS WOULD
PRODUCE. THIS WAS WHY WE FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO BEGIN
TO DISCUSS THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A WEST BANK/GAZA
SETTLEMENT IN MORE SPECIFIC TERMS. WE FELT AS A
RESULT OF OUR EXPLORATIONS THERE WAS A CONSENSUS THAT
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THERE HAD TO BE A TRANSITIONAL OR INTERIM PERIOD OF SOME KIND FOR THESE AREAS. SAUD ASKED WHETHER A PLAN ALONG THESE LINES FOR WEST BANK/GAZA WAS BEING DISCUSSED. I SAID NOT IN SPECIFIC TERMS, BUT THE IDEA WAS BEING THOUGHT ABOUT AS A CONCEPT. WHEN IT CAME TO SPECIFICS THE PARTIES HAD VERY DIFFERENT IDEAS. ISRAEL HAD PUT FORWARD ITS SELF-RULE PLAN WHICH THE U.S. DOES NOT CONSIDER SUFFICIENT AS IT STANDS. OUR MAIN RESERVATION IS THAT IT DOES NOT MAKE CLEAR THAT THE PROPOSED REGIME MUST EVENTUALLY GIVE WAY TO SOMETHING FURTHER IN TERMS OF A FINAL SETTLEMENT. WE FELT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE THE FINAL QUESTIONS IN NEGOTIATIONS AT THIS TIME.

14. SAUD ASKED, SO THE JORDANIANS WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT LIES BEHIND THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES? I SAID THAT WAS A FAIR INTERPRETATION OF THEIR POSITION. THEY WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHERE THE DECLARATION LEADS IN REAL TERMS. SAUD SAID THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THIS PROBLEM LIES IN THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIANS. I SAID THAT IF WE COULD GET A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES -- THE RIGHT KIND OF DECLARATION -- IT WOULD BE A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, AND I POINTED OUT THAT SUCH A DECLARATION WOULD BE AN ADVANCE OVER RESOLUTION 242 IN ITS TREATMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE. AT THIS POINT I SHOWED SAUD OUR TABULAR COMPARISON OF THE VARIOUS DRAFTS ON THE DECLARATION AND EXPLAINED IN SOME DETAIL THE POINTS AT ISSUE.

15. SAUD SAID THAT ONE THING WAS CLEAR: IT WAS ONLY WHEN THE U.S. TAKES A STRONG POSITION THAT
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THE ISRAELIS BEGIN TO MODERATE THEIR POLICIES. I SAID ONE OF THE ASSETS IN THE PRESENT SITUATION WAS THAT THE PRESIDENT IS IN AN ENTIRELY CREDIBLE POSITION VIS-A-VIS OUR OWN PUBLIC OPINION. HE HAD ASKED THAT THE ARABS COMMIT THEMSELVES TO A REAL PEACE AND NOW SADAT HAD DONE THIS. SAUD AGREED BUT SAID PEOPLE ARE NOW ASKING WHAT PRACTICAL BENEFITS HAS THE SADAT INITIATIVE PRODUCED? TRUE, DEBATE HAD BEGUN WITHIN ISRAEL, AND PERHAPS PUBLIC OPINION IN THE U.S. WAS CHANGING,

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BUT PEOPLE ARE ASKING WHERE ARE THE PRACTICAL RESULTS. SAUD SAID THE EUPHORIA IS NOW GONE AND PEOPLE IN THE ARAB WORLD ARE LOOKING AT SADAT'S INITIATIVE WITH A COLDER EYE. I SAID THAT AS FAR AS THE U.S. WAS CONCERNED, WE HAD A FIRM DETERMINATION NOT TO MISS THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED BY THE SADAT INITIATIVE. WE KNEW THAT IN THE END WE WOULD BE JUDGED BY THE RESULTS THAT WERE ACHIEVED. I SAID THAT BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY WERE FULLY COMMITTED TO DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE A MIDDLE EAST PEACE.

16. SAUD RETURNED TO THE THEME THAT THE U.S. POSITION ON THE ISSUES WAS A CRITICAL FACTOR. FOR EXAMPLE, THE U.S. HAD TAKEN A FIRM POSITION ON THE NEED FOR THE ARABS TO RECOGNIZE AND EXTEND PEACE TO ISRAEL AND EVENTUALLY THE ARABS HAD MOVED TO THAT POSITION. IF THE U.S. WAS EQUALLY FIRM, ISRAEL WOULD ALSO MODERATE ITS POSITIONS. I
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AGREED THAT IT WAS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE, BUT I AGAIN MADE THE POINT THAT THE ARAB POSITION WAS ALSO A

VERY IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE EQUATION.

17. AT THE END OF THE MEETING, SAUD AGREED
I COULD SAY IN MY REMARKS TO THE PRESS THAT
HE HAD REAFFIRMED SAUDI SUPPORT FOR OUR PEACE
EFFORTS AND HOPED FOR THEIR SUCCESS.

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